



# Nebraska 2013 Upland Game Hunting Outlook

The following forecast is based on spring and summer upland-game population surveys, including the April and July Rural Mail Carrier Surveys, and the Northern Bobwhite Whistle Count Survey. In addition, district biologists provided input on conditions on-the-ground that was used to refine the recommendations based on survey results. Staff input included regional weather events that could have impacted populations and general range conditions. The descriptions below reflect the best available information regarding the relative abundances of small and upland game species among the regions of Nebraska, but cannot be used to predict hunting conditions or local population densities at any single location within a region.

## **RING-NECKED PHEASANTS**

The severe drought of 2012 continues to impact pheasant populations statewide, mostly through habitat reductions caused by stunted vegetation growth and emergency haying and grazing. Much of the state remains in some category of drought, and the USDA has again authorized emergency haying and grazing of CRP land in 54 of Nebraska's 93 counties (see [www.fsa.usda.gov/ne](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/ne) for the latest information, including a map of the affected counties). April and July Rural Mail Carrier Survey data indicated that pheasant populations are mostly lower compared to 2012 (see reverse). Based on these surveys, the Southwest and Panhandle will again offer the best opportunities. Early and mid-summer rains produced abundant brood-rearing habitat. In the Southwest, abundance should be better than in 2012, but still lower than found in previous years. Hunters should be advised that hunting wheat and milo stubble may offer hunting opportunities this year. Over 20,000 acres of mostly wheat have been enrolled in the Open Fields and Waters program in South-central, Southwest, and Panhandle regions, listed in the online version of the Public Lands Atlas: [www.outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/programs/CRP/atlas.asp](http://www.outdoornebraska.ne.gov/hunting/programs/CRP/atlas.asp). At the time of forecast preparation, few broods have been observed by field staff; however, a late spring seems to have delayed breeding this year, which might account somewhat for the lack of broods. The overall consensus among staff is for a below average season, with some regional optimism related to the outcome of this year's delayed production. Habitat loss in the eastern counties continues to be a concern. Hunters are again advised to scout areas prior to hunting to make certain areas are still available.

## **NORTHERN BOBWHITE**

In contrast to pheasants, bobwhite abundance increased regionally and statewide compared to 2012. Results from the July Rural Mail Carrier Survey and the Bobwhite Whistle Count Survey both indicated regional and statewide increases in bobwhite abundance. Decreases were only noted for the North-Central region (RMCS; see reverse) and West Platte region (Whistle Count). Although staff has observed some broods so far, it appears that the breeding season was delayed, postponing the peak in brood abundance. Observations among staff, particularly in the Southeast and East-Central regions support the results of the RMCS and Whistle Counts. Johnson, Pawnee, and Richardson Counties should have more bobwhites compared to 2012.

## **PRAIRIE GROUSE (SHARP-TAILED GROUSE & GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN)**

The July Rural Mail Carrier Survey indicated regional and statewide declines in prairie grouse abundance compared to 2012. Regional declines were greatest in the Northeast and Central regions. The Sandhills, west of Highway 81 in the western grouse zone, continues to be the core of the prairie grouse range in Nebraska, and will offer the best opportunities for harvest this year. East of Highway 81, in the eastern grouse zone (special, free permit required) brood observations, like those of pheasants and bobwhites, have been few. Further, habitat loss continues to accelerate in the eastern zone. Southwest Johnson and western Pawnee should offer the best chances this year.

## **COTTONTAILS**

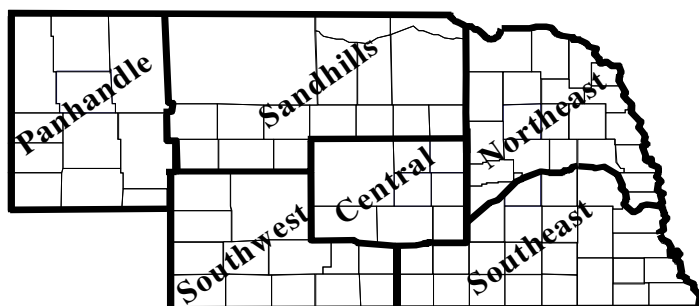
Indices of cottontail abundance were increasing to stable in the Southeast and Northeast, respectively, compared to 2012, but declined elsewhere, based on the Rural Mail Carrier Survey. The Southeast, Central, and Northeast regions should offer the best opportunities this year.

◆ *See back of sheet for regional survey results* ◆



# Nebraska 2013 Upland Game Bird Survey Results

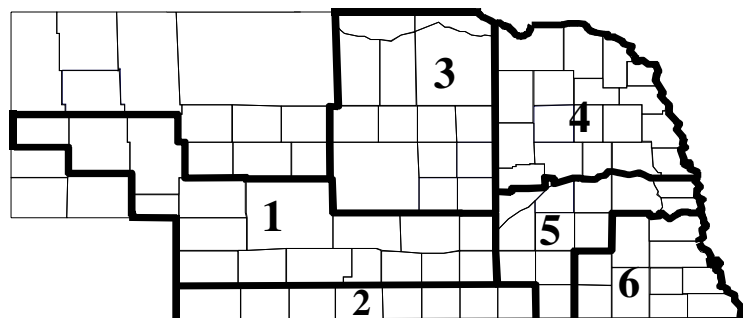
## Pheasant Survey Units:



Region	% Change from 2012* July Rural Mail Carrier Survey	OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on Rural Mail Carrier Survey and staff observations)
Central	-69	6	Custer, Howard, Sherman
Northeast	+2	3	Antelope, Knox, Pierce
Panhandle	-48	2	Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Sheridan
Sandhills	-18	4	Cherry, Thomas
Southeast	-33	5	Fillmore, Kearney
Southwest	-54	1	E. Chase, E. Dundy, Hitchcock, Hayes, Perkins
Statewide	-38		

## Bobwhite Units:

1. West Platte
2. Republican
3. North Central
4. Northeast
5. East Central
6. Southeast



Region	% CHANGE FROM 2012*		OVERALL Abundance Rank (1 = Best)	Top Counties (Based on Rural Mail Carrier Survey and staff observations)
	Bobwhite Whistle Count	Rural Mail Carrier Survey		
West Platte	-27	0	5	Adams, Kearney, Phelps
Republican	+31	+70	4	Furnas, Hitchcock, Nuckolls, Thayer
North Central	+103	-44	2	Custer, Holt, Greeley, Sherman
Northeast	+25	+38	6	Antelope, Knox
East Central	+126	+23	3	Fillmore, Jefferson, Saunders, Seward
Southeast	+18	+107	1	Johnson, Pawnee, Richardson, Saline
Statewide	+16	0		

\* For low-ranked regions, large percent changes in indices might not translate into noticeable changes in hunting conditions.